

No. 61.

Price One Penny.

ONE PENNY WEEKLY.

EVERY WEDNESDAY.

STANFIELD HALL.

By J. F. SMITH,

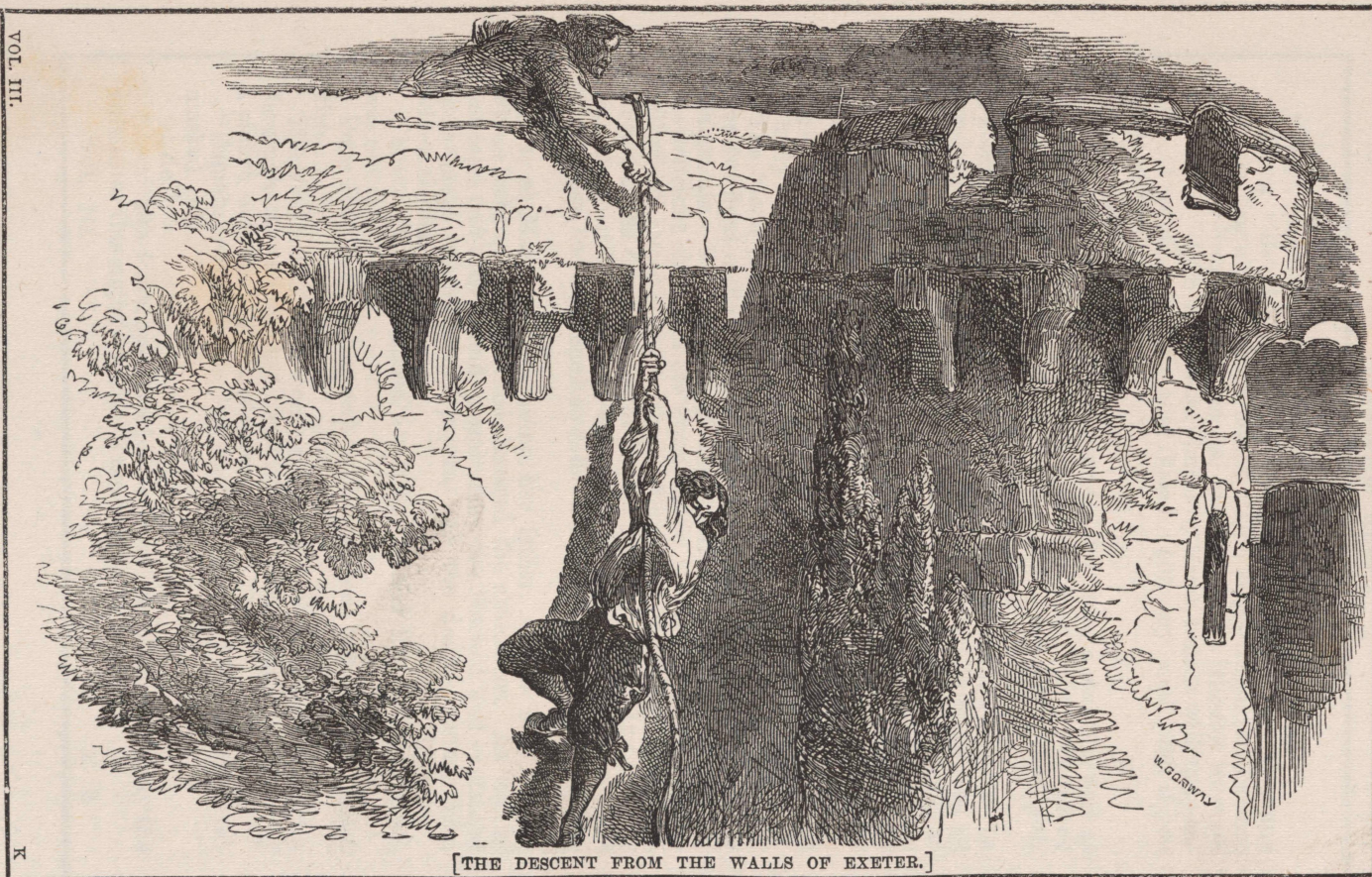
Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.



Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.
AND OTHER EMINENT ARTISTS.

LONDON:
PUBLISHED AT THE "LONDON JOURNAL" OFFICE,
12 and 13, FETTER LANE.

All Back Numbers still on Sale.



"Now, where are they?"

"Here, villain!" exclaimed the girl, turning suddenly round and levelling a pistol at his head. "One step—lessen the distance but a hair's breadth between us, and the bullet whistles through your brain. I am alone—maddened by terror, frantic with desperation. I would not have your blood upon my soul; but if you advance, you die."

"You dare not."

"Trust not to that," she continued; "I have a hand as firm as thine hath been for evil. Traitor, I defy thee. Help! murder! treason!" she shrieked, at the very stretch of her voice; for, with all her boasting, she was loth to shed his blood.

Peter Hurl was a coward, and cruel men generally are. As he gazed upon the excited, beautiful being before him, he read an expression in her flashing eye which awed him. Brave death he dared not; but, cur-like, was about to fly like a tiger baffled in its spring, when the door was burst open, and Henry Vavassour and a party of Royalists entered the room. Several of them were soldiers of the queen's guard. Mary no sooner beheld him than she dropped the weapon, and sank fainting in his arms; the rest quickly secured the intended murderer.

The blood rushed to the heart of the youth as he felt that graceful head reclining on his shoulder, her heart beating wildly against his. Unconscious of the intoxicating poison, he drained the delicious chalice of the Circe—hope. Alas! he little knew the gall which rested at the bottom. His ardent imagination had been struck, at the first moment he beheld her, by her beauty; and the rich music of her voice, as she atoned for her father's first want of courtesy, had awakened an echo in his heart sadly heard in after-years.

Just as Mary was recovering, her father, Martin, and a lady, whose features were masked, entered the apartment. As soon as her tears and sobs would permit her, the rescued girl explained the attempt to obtain the papers, and the double outrage from which she had escaped.

"Brave girl!" exclaimed her father; "and the pistol, after all, was not charged."

Peter Hurl ground his teeth with impotent rage when he heard him.

The alarm had been conveyed into the street, and Captain Jerningham, who had been making his usual rounds, attended by a picket, now made his appearance.

"Captain Jerningham, you see yon ruffian?" exclaimed the masked lady.

"I do."

"Lead him forth, and let a halter from the nearest tree pay the villain for this night's work. Take him from my sight."

"I dare not, madam. I have no power to pronounce or execute so just a sentence. His fate must be referred to the queen."

"The queen hath spoken it," said the lady, unmasking, and discovering her features. "We will answer for our judgment to God and to our husband."

All present bent the knee, except the military, who presented arms; for the speaker was Henrietta Maria, queen of England.

CHAPTER IX.

NO sooner did the blustering bully behold the countenance of Henrietta Maria, and heard her fearful order, than his wine-pot courage left him, and he became as abject in his terror as he had previously been brutal and daring in the outrage he had offered to helpless innocence. Falling on his knees, he clung despairingly to the long, dark mantle which enveloped the person of the queen, and piteously implored for life—urging his loyalty, services, and what he was ready to undertake in support of the Royal cause. Women invariably despise cowardice in man. There is something in it repellent to their nature, and the haughty Frenchwoman listened to his prayers with cold disdain. Probably she had not much faith in the promise of a man whose resolution was in his tongue, and whose heart was weaker than a girl's.

"Spare me," he cried: "I am not fit to die. I must—I will have time to repent, to plead to God for mercy. My sins would damn a legion. Plunge me in prison; make me the companion of the foul toad and newt; let my dungeon be dark as my own thoughts;—I ask but life—a week, a day!"

"Not an hour. What! in the very precincts of our Court, an attempt upon the honour of a noble lady!—to seize, like a felon traitor, the letters of our husband! Away with him!"

"Mercy! mercy!"

"Justice, justice," replied the queen.

Two of the halberdiers, on a sign from Captain Jerningham, advanced, and laid their iron grasp upon his shoulder. He shivered at their touch as at the grasp of that grim skeleton whose blow is death. Turning towards Mary, who was still leaning, pale and half-fainting, on the shoulder of Henry Vavassour, he besought her to intercede for him, swearing by every saint in heaven that he never meant to harm her—that he was mad drunk—called Heaven to witness his loyalty at the very moment he had betrayed it. Terrified as the poor girl had been, she could not listen unmoved to his frantic prayer. His agony appalled her; and although she turned from him with heart-loathing and disgust, it was to bend the knee, and solicit that his life might at least be spared. A gleam

of hope flashed from his bloodshot eye as Peter Hurl listened to her generous pleading. He turned imploringly from her to Henrietta to watch her countenance. His heart turned cold as he marked its firm and unrelenting expression.

"Not even to your prayer, deeply as we are indebted to your service, will we loose this bloodhound on our track. Why are we not obeyed?"

"Remove him," exclaimed Jerningham, whose indignation, since he had heard his crime, almost equalled her majesty's.

The soldiers now seized him by the arms, and forcibly raised him from his knees. Despite his desperate struggles, they bound his arms with cords. No sooner did the wretch feel that he was pinioned, than hope forsook him, and he became as fearful in his curses as he had previously been contemptible in his supplications. His eyes rolled wildly as he tried to fix them on the queen.

"You shall answer for my soul to God!" he shrieked. "My blood fall on you; the blood of the lost—the damned! I curse you in your children. May your days be lonely and uncheered—crownless!"

Then, as a gleam of hope came over him, he again wept, and passionately pleaded for life.

Henrietta's last reply was a silent waving of the hand as she turned away.

Peter was now near the door, held, or rather dragged there, by the united efforts of half-a-dozen men. Suddenly breaking from them, he rushed towards the queen, and had not his arms been confined, doubtless would have raised his hands against her. Grinding his teeth with rage at his impotence for further evil, he cried aloud: "Murderess!" and absolutely spat upon her robe.

"Not the sword, young man," said Henrietta, calmly, as Henry Vavassour, in his horror at the outrage, was rushing upon him. "The cord, the cord; he is too ignoble for a soldier's death."

"Listen," cried Peter, hoarsely. "That she-wolf would have bribed me to murder. Blood is on her soul, if not her hands; the blood of Cromwell—a thousand pounds—knife!"

Here his words were broken by the knuckles of the soldiers, who held him by the throat as they forced him from the apartment. His shrieks, as they dragged him through the passage, long echoed in the ears of those who heard him. Martin, determined to see the last of his old enemy, slipped out behind the guard which remained, and followed them.

"This is no scene, poor girl, for you," sighed the queen; "although the hospitality is poor we have to offer, you shall not refuse it. Sir Malcolm Keinton," she added, turning to the knight, "you and your daughter must accompany us to the palace. We attach her to our service and our person."

A command so expressly given could only be replied to by a

grateful acquiescence ; and Mary, although she disapproved of the speaker's hasty judgment, rejoiced in the offer ; it was a pledge, at least, of protection.

Replacing her mask, and leaning on the arm of Lord Neville, who, with several officers of her household, had arrived, her majesty descended the narrow staircase of the hostel, to the astonishment of the crowd of guests in the room beneath. There was a respectful silence as she passed, the soldiers forming a line on either side to protect her passage. Mary and her father followed.

Led by the yells of the *ci-devant* captain, the old huntsman followed the party who were leading him to execution. The spot chosen was the open space before the market cross, the whipping-post at the south side of which was to serve as a gibbet. The prisoner lay like a log of wood upon the ground, moaning piteously. Several of the soldiers had lit torches, and their red glare cast an unnatural light upon the scene. Crowds of citizens, attracted by the different rumours of an attempt upon the life of the queen, whom some asserted to be murdered, others only wounded, were pressing eagerly behind the circle which the military formed. Martin being recognised, was admitted within its precincts.

"Poor devil ! it will soon be over," said the jolly host of the Crown to his buxom daughter, who, in the kindness of her nature, was sobbing on his arm ; here comes the finisher of the law. When Jack feels a man's pulse it is all over with him ; his touch is worse than a physician's."

The executioner, who resided in the gaol, having been suddenly sent for, arrived with ungartered hose and bare-headed. Those who had been sent to summon him had given him scant time for preparation. Although accustomed to his dreadful office, there was something in the idea of an execution by torchlight which shook even his iron nerves, and he trembled as he approached the place of execution. As soon as the crowd beheld him, they made way for him with that superstitious terror and disgust which the lower classes feel in England for the executioner. They would have scoffed had they been told that, in some countries, his office was considered noble.

"Which is the man ?" he demanded of the officer who commanded the party.

The captain pointed at the prisoner with his sword. No sooner did the hangman behold the features of the criminal, than the calm expression of his countenance changed to one of ferocious joy. A low chuckle broke, like a serpent's hiss, through his grisly beard, and his nerves instantly became like his heart—of iron.

"This gallant ! ho ! ho ! ho ! the popinjay who spurned me three days since in the public street, because, in passing him, my cloak fluttered against his doublet ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! It was, it

seems, the more honest garment of the two! I told him then it was bad quarrelling with the executioner. Did I not?" he added, touching him contemptuously with his foot, for, like most of his fearful trade, he had a profound contempt for those who died under their hands like curs.

"Thy duty, man," said Jerningham, sternly; "it is no part of thine office to torture him."

The ruffian glared ferociously upon the speaker, and cursed him in his heart. Prudence prevented his tongue from hazarding a reply. Hastily mounting a ladder, which one of the soldiers had procured from the neighbouring church, he ascended with alacrity to the post, on the summit of which there was an iron ring, and grinned with suppressed delight as he fixed the cord, straightening it after he had made the noose to see that it was right; he then threw himself off the ladder, and slid to the ground by it.

"Ay, ay, it's strong enough," observed one of the citizens; "Jack knows his business."

"At any rate," replied another, "those he works for never complain of his lack of skill; and that is more than can be said of all trades, neighbour."

The executioner now approached his victim, whom two soldiers were holding up between them, for the wretch had fainted. With the professional coolness of some surgeon about to perform an operation, he turned down his doublet, and with an infernal gusto felt his throat, as if to ascertain the exact spot where the knot should be tied. The spectators shuddered. Giving the men a signal to bear the prostrate wretch after him, he advanced to the ladder, and began slowly to ascend the steps, the soldiers following.

"There goes a fatted calf to the shambles!" cried a butcher, who was gazing with eager eyes upon the scene, and almost fancied he should like to be the executioner of the law's stern sentence; for he, too, had frequently been insulted on the city causeway by the pinioned bully, who had long been the terror of the quiet citizens of Exeter.

Just as they began to ascend the ladder with him, Peter Hurl recovered his consciousness; life returned at the very instant he was about to lose it in so fearful a manner. With a loud yell he sprang from the arms of the soldiers, and began to run round the circle at the foot of the gibbet, like some baited beast seeking an opening to escape from his tormentors. Everywhere the rank was perfect—not a gap for terror to escape through. Shrieking frantically for mercy, he was chased round and round the ring by the hangman and the guard till they once more held him in their iron grasp.

"Despatch him!" exclaimed Jerningham, disgusted with the scene.

"It's murder!" shrieked Peter; "I have not been tried! Mercy!"

The executioner quickly made fast one end of a cord to the rope which bound the prisoner's arms, and he was once more forced towards the fatal spot. The hangman ascended first, dragging his victim up the ladder after him. The cries of the wretched man became terrific, and many, overcome by horror of the scene, fled the spot. As soon as he reached a convenient distance, he applied the fatal noose to the prisoner's neck, and hastily descended the steps, first loosening the cord by which he had drawn him up. He and Peter Hurl stood on the same staith; for a moment they glanced horribly into each others' faces—madness was in the countenance of one, hate and scornful triumph gleamed in the features of the other.

"Now, then, for our ride, bully captain," whispered the minister of the law in his ear, as he took the pinioned ruffian in his arms, and wound his legs round his. "Satan gives the signal—hell laughs at the race. Now, then—once, twice, and away."

"A moment—a prayer—a——"

At the word "away," the men below removed the ladder, and hangman and victim were left swinging in the air. The former no sooner felt the shock of the fall than he glided down the heaving body, and, like a snake, dropped upon the ground. All turned with horror from his glance; there seemed pollution in his touch—pestilence in his breath. With a triumphant grin he threw himself upon the steps of the market cross, and remained watching the body.

Bad as old Martin knew Peter Hurl to have been, and indignant as he felt at the outrage attempted upon the honour of his young mistress, he could not contemplate the villain's death unmoved. The summary justice of the queen displeased his English notions of propriety, and he hated the sight of an execution. Not that the huntsman doubted the utility of hanging—he was not advanced in his philosophy far enough for that. Hanging he held to be a part either of the Constitution or Gospel—he was not quite certain which; but he had an Englishman's love of fair-play, and considered that even Peter ought to have had a trial. As he turned the angle of a street which led to the rampart, a dark shadow flitted in the grey moonlight before him. Martin started; he felt assured that it was Barford.

"That devil here," he muttered to himself. "He, then, has been at the bottom of the plot. Let him look out this time. I am on the scent. Had he as many lives as a polecat, I should be too much for him at last."

Barford, unconscious that he was watched, glided along till he reached the rampart, which he began to ascend rapidly. He was pale as death. A cold perspiration stood upon his brow, and his limbs shook under him as he moved along. He had just witnessed the execution of the instrument of his crime, and trembled to

think how he might have implicated him in his confession. To remain in Exeter under such circumstances was to court certain death. With his usual foresight, he had at an early hour in the evening fixed a coiled rope to one of the jutting stones which formed the battlement. He knew that, in the event of a discovery, it might serve him as a last resource; and the event justified his forethought.

Crime is generally timid. The echo of his own tread startled him. He took each buttress as he stalked along for a soldier upon duty; nor drew breath till he reached the spot where the means of escape were concealed. With nervous anxiety he sought them in the long grass, nor drew his breath freely till he found them.

"Again I have escaped," he murmured, as he threw the coil over the wall. "There is a spell in hatred; it keeps action and energy together. I cannot die and leave the debt unpaid."

"Can't you?" thought Martin to himself, as he drew a sharp knife from his pocket; "we shall see."

The huntsman had followed him—dogged him at every turn; now falling flat upon the ground, now crouching, like a hare in his form, to escape observation. Crawling upon his hands and knees like a dog, he had contrived to ensconce himself behind a heavy gun-carriage, which the soldiers had overturned upon the ramparts the previous day.

"It will hold," said Barford, pulling the cord to try its strength.

"Will it?" whispered Martin, grasping his knife.

Shaking his fist, with a glance of disappointed hate towards the city, the unhappy man, whose evil passions were his bane, let himself over the battlement, and began carefully to let himself down. The height of the wall was about seventy feet, and its base was washed by a broad, stagnant moat, half-filled up with rushes, reeds, and rank vegetation.

Barford had descended about ten feet from the summit of the wall, when the cord began to vibrate fearfully; he looked up, and saw his old antagonist in the act of cutting it. For a moment his senses swam, and his strength became paralysed. He gasped to catch his breath.

"I told you," said the huntsman, "we should meet again. Remember Keinton."

The cord broke, and splash—a heavy fall into the moat. Martin shuddered; it was the first time that in cold blood he had, as he believed, ever taken life, and the deed appalled him.

"God forgive me," sighed the old man, "if I have done wrong; but he was the bitter enemy of those who are dearest to me—the persecutor of my young lady—the false witness against her father, whose bread I ate these forty years. No," he added, after a moment's pause, "I have not done wrong; he was a villain who

deserved death even more than Peter Hurl. His crime was necessity, perhaps; Barford's, choice."

Casting a second glance over the parapet to see if he could distinguish anything of the body, but without success, the speaker turned upon his way. His heart would not have been so well at ease had he seen Barford, a few minutes after, crawl like a wounded reptile from out the moat. His limbs were fearfully bruised from the fall, and one arm broken; but still he lived, to work more evil to those whom Martin would have died to serve.

Five days after the skirmish at Chalgrove, Sir Herbert of Stanfield was summoned to the tent of Prince Rupert. On his arrival he found his serene highness seated at a table, amusing himself by sketching the plan of a battle.

"Welcome," said the gallant commander of the Cavaliers; "doubtless, Sir Herbert, you are surprised at our summons; it is to confide an important trust in your hands. No thanks," he added; "could we bestow it better, we should do so."

The young soldier only bowed to the compliment, and waited to receive his orders.

"You are acquainted, I believe, with the country between here and London?"

"Well, your highness."

"And know, on the heath below Henley, a spot called the Maid's Oak?"

"Where tradition says a promise made is sure to be avenged if broken; and hence the superstitious peasantry and youthful lovers seek the spot to make their bargains or plight their mutual faith."

"A singular tradition," observed Rupert, smiling, "and the place oddly chosen. No matter, it is too late to alter it now. Pshaw! I am growing full of fancies as a dreaming girl. I marked your skill the other day with the cross-bow; you must take yours with you."

"Cross-bow!" exclaimed the young man, colouring; "I trust your highness does not intend to employ me in any unknighly service?"

"The duty would have been mine, young man, had circumstances permitted it; as it is, I am to remain a prisoner."

"A prisoner?"

"At least till you return. Take your horse, mount, and ride to the tree; at the latest be there an hour before sunset; hide in the thick clustering branches; stir not a bough, but let your heart be firm and your hand sure."

"And what am I to do there?" demanded the astonished Cavalier.

"Wait the arrival of two horsemen, who will approach at the same moment. One will wear a white plume; take no heed of him; but with your bow cover the person of the other; if he offers

treachery, if you see but a doubtful movement of his hand, fire."

"It is a strange duty your highness has charged me with; but I accept it; for in saying that, had circumstances permitted it, it would have been yours, you assure me it is a post of honour."

"One that your ancestors would have been proud of," said the prince, rising, and laying his hand familiarly upon his shoulder, since it is to watch over the safety of your king."

"The king!" repeated Herbert, with surprise.

"Is to meet Cromwell," whispered Rupert, "in that lonely spot. Much as I hate the Roundhead, I do not think he would tempt Heaven by sacrilegious violence upon an anointed head. Still precaution will not be thrown away. I am to remain as hostage for his safe return. You see," he added, with a bitter smile, "the churl values himself already highly, when a king's son must be the pledge of the rebel's safety."

From these words Herbert judged that an interview had been arranged between Charles and the great leader of the Independents, and that the precaution taken by Rupert of placing someone on whom he could rely in the tree was merely meant to secure the personal safety of the king should Cromwell be tempted to offer treachery—an act which, with all his violence and ambition, he was incapable of. The life of the Royal Stuart was sacred in his eyes, *unless he could take it legally.*

"I understand your highness," said the young man, "and will to the life defend my master's person. When must I set forth?"

"Within an hour. The interview takes place at sunset. Before the appointed time you must be there. I need not add, this is a confidence to be received with a discretion equal to the importance of the interests it affects."

With this understanding the speakers parted; the prince to yield himself up to the party of Ironsides appointed to guard him by Cromwell, as a hostage during his absence, and Herbert to his tent to prepare for his solitary post.

Hastily donning his simple hunting suit of dark-green, and retaining only his sword and cross-bow, our hero started forth on foot to the appointed place of rendezvous.

As he paced his lonely way, sweet fancies and sad thoughts came over him; his heart turned to the recollection of his young bride, so newly-wedded, and so cruelly parted from him by the stern necessity of war. A thousand times had he prayed that the unnatural strife might cease, and now there seemed a hope that his wishes would be realised. Everything depended on the approaching interview. Could Charles persuade, bribe, or dazzle the iron-minded man he was about to meet, England would sheathe the sword, hearths yet undesolated by the brand of civil war might

be spared, and he might enjoy with his Mary that delicious repose of love his soul so thirsted for.

The place of rendezvous was a half-inclosed heath, in the centre of which stood an aged oak, whose giant arms, clad in umbrageous beauty, cast a broad shadow on the earth. Tradition assigned to this patriarch of the forest an antiquity mounting to the time of the Druids. It had been named the Maiden's Oak, from a tale still cherished by the rustics, that a noble Saxon girl had listened under its shelter to the vows of one of the Norman conquerors of her country, and, like many others, been abandoned and betrayed. Heartbroken she visited the spot so fatal to her happiness. This time she came to die, and prayed, in the bitterness of her last hour, that Heaven would, in pity for her sufferings and shame, visit with its vengeance the violation of an oath made under the tree which had been the witness of her false lover's perjuries and her shame. Her request had received a curious fulfilment; for the Norman knight, while hunting, had been overtaken by a storm, and was struck dead by lightning while under the very tree, whither he had ridden for shelter. Tradition, more constant than her lover, has handed the legend down to our days.

"This must be the spot," said Herbert, as he arrived beneath the oak; "and, by my knighthood, a better could not have been chosen for the purpose. There's not a bush within gun-shot would yield a hiding-place even for a sparrow—nothing but the high dank grass and a distant clump of rushes rising from the banks of a stagnant pool."

Casting an experienced eye around to make himself perfectly acquainted with the locality, he slung his bow behind him, and hastily mounted the gnarled trunk, and ensconced himself comfortably in the middle of the branches. The spot he had chosen was most convenient, since one withered branch which curled downwards afforded him an excellent resting-place for his weapon, which he could turn in any direction; whilst the rest so screened him that it was all but impossible he should be seen.

Just as the sun was setting in that gold and purple glory which, like the robe of empire, veils his couch, Herbert perceived a solitary horseman directing his way towards his hiding-place. The rays of the parting luminary falling behind him cast a long shadow, which preceded him and gave an unearthly, phantom-like appearance to his massive outline. It was Cromwell. The young knight gazed on him as he directed its heavy Flemish charger towards the Maiden's Oak with a feeling of mingled awe and dislike. To him he appeared a man who had been destined by fate to perform some great but not beneficent action. There was solitude in his path, for his orbit contained none like him; indeed, it is remarkable that Providence, when, for its special purpose, it stamps its divinity upon a genius, or its wrath upon a tyrant, creates for them a course in

which they move unapproachable and alone ; they have few sympathies but with their destiny, and pursue their career impelled by a force which is not theirs, but lent them for some end—that once performed, the fire becomes extinct, and nought remains of the volcano but its ashes.

The moment he arrived beneath the tree he dismounted from his steed, removed the bit from its mouth, and left the animal to nibble the luxuriant grass at its pleasure. The sagacious creature was so well trained that its master knew it would not wander far from his side, or that with a signal he could recall it. He next looked peeringly up into the tree. The watcher felt his heart beat, but he resolutely held his breath, fearing lest it should betray him. Satisfied apparently with the scrutiny, Cromwell turned aside, and after pacing to and fro for a few moments, fell upon his knees to pray.

It was a fearful thing to listen to the outpourings of that heart which, from childhood, had brooded over dreams which fate sometimes makes realities. In his agony, his doubt of himself, he called upon the Lord with the passionate but familiar expressions of his sect to strengthen him:—to pluck the lust of power from his breast; to blind him to the glare of ambition, and continue him in the path He had marked out. "I am but a potsherd in Thy hand; burn me not in Thy wrath. I am but a rush before Thy breath; let it bend, not break me. Satan is busy with my carnal nature; let not the enemy prevail."

So intent had Cromwell been in his prayer, and Herbert in watching him, that they perceived not the approach of a second horseman till the tramp of his steed's hoofs startled them both. In an instant the Puritan started from his supplicating posture, and was again the soldier and the statesman. The young knight remembered his duty, and with his cross-bow covered the person of the stern Republican.

No sooner had Charles dismounted than he approached the tree where Cromwell was waiting him. For a few moments they gazed in silence on each other. Their glance expressed that quiet fascination with which men look on destiny. The king was the first to speak :

"Thy name is Cromwell ?"

The Puritan bowed his head in the affirmative.

Thy bearing argues but little for our meeting," continued the speaker, hurt, perhaps, that the calm soldier of the people should presume to stand uncovered in his presence. "It is not thus that kings and subjects meet."

"Here is neither king nor subject," replied the man of destiny, "but two human creatures met to discuss the interests of a nation whose welfare depends upon their action. Be indeed a king, govern thy people in charity and justice, and such homage as one

being without sin may render to another, Cromwell will pay to thee."

"What hast thou to complain of?" demanded Charles.

"More than the meanest of thy subjects, nothing; but with them, everything. Where are the ancient liberties of England?—crushed beneath a sceptre whose rule has been of iron; where the wealth with which God blessed the land?—fretted away in useless wars, in idle pageants, whose end is vanity; where the pure Church, which sprang from Rome's corruptions like an innocent babe from a polluted mother?—thou hast decked it with the garment of episcopal corruption, rendering its leprosy more hideous by its garishness; thou hast wrung from labour its hard earnings at thy caprice. Men will no longer bear these things; humanity, like a strong child, has outgrown its swathing clothes, and must walk. It depends but on thee whether its steps should be in advance or backwards."

"The rights I hold," replied the king, "I inherited with my sceptre."

Cromwell paused and eyed him for a moment with the same sarcastic expression which all had marked upon his countenance the day Charles entered the House to arrest the refractory members.

"It trembles loosely in your hand since you violated the sanctuary of England's laws and set royal prerogative above a nation's rights. I know the lust of empire; it is luring to the sight, but bitter to the taste."

"Thou hast felt it, Cromwell," observed the king, bitterly.

"I have felt it, *and conquered it*. Now listen to the terms which may again seat thee, not on a pageant throne, but on one reared in the hearts of thy people. Confirm their just, inalienable rights; reform the Church; correct the luxurious habits of thy Court; and though the scars thy acts have left may never be effaced, the pain they caused may be forgiven."

During this extraordinary interview, the speakers had continued to pace up and down beneath the tree where the sentinel sat watching them. Gradually they moved out of hearing. Herbert, to judge from their animated gestures, imagined that words raged high. It was a contest between fancied right and real strength. Gradually they cooled down, and seemed to come to a better understanding.

"Keep thy pledge," he heard the king observe, as they again approached within hearing, "and it shall meet with its reward. What our Royal favour can do for thee, it shall."

"The worm cannot be raised beyond its nature unless the Creator wills it," replied the Puritan, with a proud humility; "more than the eagle thou canst not elevate me."

"To a place in the councils of thy sovereign, and a memory in the hearts of thy country."

Herbert failed to catch what followed; and for nearly half-an-hour their words fell upon his strained ear like distant murmurings broken by the night breeze. The compact, whatever its nature, was apparently accepted. He thought he heard words which sounded like an earldom and the garter—perchance his ear deceived him—or that he caught but the echo of a vainly proffered bribe. Just as the speakers were about to mount their horses to separate, the young man observed a curious, undulating movement in the grass, like that occasioned by a serpent as it winds its uncoiled length along when pursuing its prey. He was startled, and kept his eye upon it, and his hand upon his cross-bow. Suddenly a man, who had been creeping towards the place of rendezvous, rose from the ground, and with a long knife in his hand, rushed towards Cromwell, as he was bowing his head in token of adieu. The neck, just where the back-piece of the armour joins the helmet, was exposed. Another instant, and how different a page might have been written in the book of England's history! One pressure from the forefinger of Herbert's hand, and the bolt parted; the iron shaft struck the assassin directly in the forehead, and he fell, his guilty purpose unaccomplished, just as his hand was raised to strike.

Charles was the most surprised; he was as ignorant as his companion of the presence of a concealed witness of their conversation, or the approach of the intended assassin. The precaution had been entirely his nephew's—the attempted crime the deed of Henrietta, to whom he had confided the secret of his intrigue with the leader of the forces of the Parliament.

"Is this thy faith, O king?" demanded Cromwell, scornfully, pointing at the same time to the writhing body of the ruffian. "Fare thee well; I have had enough of kingly promises and kingly faith."

"Stay," exclaimed Charles, proudly—"we part not thus. Look on me. Are these the features of an assassin? Lay thy finger on my pulse—see if it beats not calmly as thine own. I would not for the brightest jewel in my crown this thing had happened."

After gazing on the speaker for a few seconds, his companion merely bowed his head in token that he believed him, and immediately advanced towards the oak from whence alone the shot could have proceeded.

"Descend," he exclaimed. "Whoever you are, I, at least, owe thee thanks."

Herbert remained silent.

"Pause not," continued the speaker. "One blast upon my bugle, and you are surrounded."

"Descend," said the king. "Be you Royalist or rebel, I will not leave the spot till this seeming treachery is explained. It concerns my honour and good faith."

The concealed knight no longer hesitated, but at once descended from the tree. Cromwell saw, despite the simplicity of his dress, at a single glance, that he was no common person.

"Thy name?" he demanded.

"I will answer for him," replied Charles. "A knight attached to our service—Herbert of Stanfield. How came you," he added, sternly, "thus concealed, a spy upon your king?"

"I had orders," replied the young man, "to place myself there."

"From whom?"

"Your majesty's nephew, Prince Rupert."

"And with what intent?" inquired Cromwell.

"To watch over the safety of his majesty, should violence have been offered. I felt it to be equally my duty to defend your life; and when I saw yon carrion hand raised, like a felon's, against it, I fired".

"Humph!" muttered Cromwell; "perchance thou hast but played the honest fool, and marred thy fortune. Farewell," he added, turning to his majesty. "Whatever the intentions of thy nephew in this matter, I acquit thee."

"Holds our compact good?"

"It does," replied the Puritan, after a pause. "Keep but thy faith, I will not fail in mine."

With these words the speaker mounted his horse and rode off.

"This is most unfortunate," observed the king, who felt humbled that anyone should have witnessed what he considered as a degradation—his interview with his rebellious subject; "poor Rupert meant it for the best, but he has strangely embarrassed me. You heard our conversation?"

"I did—in part."

"And what guarantee have I for your caution?"

"A life devoted to your service," said the young man, proudly; "if that is not sufficient, I have no other, sire, to offer."

"It is sufficient," replied the unhappy monarch, kindly; "come, let us hasten towards the camp; my absence has been, ere this, remarked. God send my nephew safely back! Strange times," he added, "when the king of merry England is compelled to wander like some knight-errant in quest of such adventures. But first rifle the doublet of yon miscreant, whose crime has cast a doubt upon a prince's loyalty, and might have stained his honour to the world, for who henceforth would have trusted to his faith?"

"All," exclaimed Herbert, "who know his princely nature, or have read his loyal heart; even yon Puritan, cold and suspicious as he is, did not dare to doubt it."

"Perhaps," said the prince; "time will show."

The young man proceeded to obey the speaker's command. In a small pocket in the inner lining of the ruffian's doublet he found a paper. As he drew it forth he saw in one corner of it the name

**NOW READY, PRICE TWO SHILLINGS EACH,
BOUND IN HANDSOME ILLUSTRATED COVERS,
J. F. SMITH'S POPULAR WORKS.**

MINNIGREY

The work contains, as well as a Dramatic Love Story, a Graphic and Accurate Account of the Glorious Victories of the Peninsular War.

THE GRAPHIC says :—"Some years before the word 'sensation' was used in its modern sense, the late Mr. J. F. Smith wrote several stories of that character for the columns of the LONDON JOURNAL. He managed exactly to hit the taste of the public which he addressed, and if anyone now wishes to know what his taste was like, let him read 'Minnigrey,' one of the most popular of all these serials, which has lately been reprinted in a cheap form. 'Minnigrey' is long; but it is full of 'go' and incident, and is both wholesome and livelier reading than a good deal of the fictional stuff which nowadays gushes from the press."

WOMAN AND HER MASTER,

This Magnificent Story is the most entrancing romance ever penned by its illustrious author. Love, adventures of the most thrilling description, comedy and tragedy, humour and pathos are delineated in all their various phases; while the characters, taken from every sphere of life, are veritable types of human nature.

THE LIVERPOOL COURIER says :—"Encouraged by the success which attended the reproduction of Mr. J. F. Smith's new story, 'Minnigrey,' in a cheap one-volume collected shape, Messrs. Bradley and Co., of 12, Fetter-lane, London, have just issued the same novelist's story of 'Woman and Her Master,' which originally appeared many years ago in the LONDON JOURNAL. The tale is narrated in 420 two-column pages, no fewer than 155 chapters being required to unravel the tangled web, but there are too many exciting incidents to allow of the perusal becoming tedious, especially when the reader is endowed with a taste for the sensational."

THE WILL AND THE WAY,

ILLUSTRATED BY SIR JOHN GILBERT, R.A.

This Story, perhaps the most artistic of its eminent author's productions, rivets the interest of the reader from beginning to end. The characters are genuine types of human nature—good and ill together—the incidents graphic and sensational, and the plot thoroughly well developed.

STANFIELD HALL

(VOL. 1),

ILLUSTRATED BY SIR JOHN GILBERT, R.A.

A Grand Historical Romance, full of thrilling incidents and graphic delineations of character, giving a vivid picture of the period portrayed.

The productions of this World-renowned Author have been reproduced in the principal European Languages, and the present is the only opportunity of obtaining these Novels in Book Form.

BRADLEY AND CO., "London Journal Office," 12 and 13, Fetter Lane, London.
To be obtained of all Booksellers at Home and Abroad.